

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 INRE-00 USIE-00 SSO-00 /027 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2935

INFO AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

UNCLAS PANAMA 5389

FOR ARA/PAN

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, PINT, PAIR, MILI, PN, PQ, BL

SUBJECT: USSOUTHCOM NEWS RELEASE ALLEGED AIRCRAFT INCIDENT

FOLG SENT ACTION IMMEDIATE SECDEF WASHDC//OASD-PA//DDI//,
COMUSAFSO ALBROOK AFS CZ//OI//, USEMB PANAMA, GOV PANCANAL
271725Z JUL 77 FROM USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ//SCPA// RPTD YOUR
ACTION

QUOTE

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SUBJ: NEWS RELEASE, ALLEGED AIRCRAFT INCIDENT (U).

A. FONECON COL BYRNE AND COL LOPEZ, USSOUTHCOM PAO, JUL 27, 1977/
FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF USSOUTHCOM NEWS RELEASE ISSUED TO LOCAL NEWS
MEDIA (INCLUDING AP AND REUTERS REPRESENTATIVES) THIS DATE CON-
CERNING AN ALLEGED INCIDENT INVOLVING PANAMANIAN AIR FORCE HELI-
COPTER AND TWO USAF A-7D AIRCRAFT ON 26 JULY 1977.

"QUARRY HEIGHTS, C.Z., 27 JULY -- UNITED STATES SOUTHERN
COMMAND TEROED AS "GROSSLY DISTORTED AND MISLEADING" PANAMANIAN
PRESS REPORTS ALLEGING A NEAR COLLISION BETWEEN A PANAMANIAN AIR
FORCE (FAP) HELICOPTER REPORTEDLY CARRYING BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT
HUGO BANZER AND PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS
AND TWO U.S. AIR FORCE A-7D JET AIRCRAFT LAST NIGHT IN THE VICINITY
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OF HOWARD AIR FORCE BASE IN THE CANAL ZONE.

"ACCORDING TO THE NEWS STORY, A COLLISION WAS AVERTED ONLY
THROUGH THE "SKILL AND PROFESSIONALISM" OF THE PANAMANIAN HELI-
COPTER PILOT.

"THE FEDERAT AVIATION ADMINISTRATION'S BALBOA CENTER, WHICH
CONTROLS AIR TRAFFIC IN THE LOCAL AIR SPACE, REPORTED HOWEVER,
THAT ALL AIRCRAFT INVOLVED WERE UNDER FULL RADAR OBSERVATION AT

ALL TIMES, THAT THEY WERE IN VOICE CONTACT WITH THE PILOTS AND ADVISED THEM OF THE AIR TRAFFIC IN THE AREA, AND THAT THEIR RADAR CONFIRMED THAT THE AIRCRAFT WERE BETWEEN ONE-HALF MILE TO ONE MILE APART WHEN THEY PASSED. THESE FACTS WERE VERIFIED BY TAPES OF VOICE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN FAA AND THE PILOTS.

"THE FAA SAID THAT AT ABOUT 7:05 P.M. THE PANAMANIAN HELICOPTER WAS FLYING OVER HOWARD AFO AT AN ALTITUDE OF 3,500 FEET, AND ASKED FOR PERMISSION TO DESCEND. THE FAA AUTHORIZED IT TO DESCEND NOT LOWER THAN 3,000 FEET, AND ADVISED IT OF THE PRESENCE OF OTHER HOWARD AIR TRAFFIC, INCLUDING THE TWO A-7D'S. THE FAP PILOT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT HAD THE A-74S IN SIGHT. THE TWO A-7'S WERE FLYING UNDER INSTRUMENT FLIGHT RULES AND RADAR CONTROL OF THE FAA AND AT AN FAA-DIRECTED ALTITUDE. FAA INFORMED THEM OF THE FAP HELICOPTER AND GAVE THEM INSTRUCTIONS TO REOAIN AT 2,100 FEET ALTITUDE. THE A-7 PILOTS ADVISED THEY HAD THE PANAMANIAN HELICOPTER IN SIGHT AT A RANGE OF FOUR MILES. THEY LATER REPORTED THAT THEY PASSED SOME ONE THOUSAND FEET BELOW AND WELL CLEAR OF THE HELICOPTER .

"THE HELICOPTER WAS IN A VISUAL FLIGHT RULES DESCENT FOR LANDING AT PANAMA CITY'S PAITILLA AIRPORT.

"ACCORDING TO THE PANAMANIAN PRESS REPORT, PRESIDENT BANZER AND GENERAL TORRIJOS WERE RETURNING FROM A VISIT TO SANTIAGO IN PANAMA'S VERAGUAS PROVINCE. NEITHER FAA NOR THE LOCAL AIR FORCE COMMAND HAD BEEN INFORMED BY PANAMANIAN AUTHORITIES WHO THE PASSENGERS WERE ABOARD THE PANAMANIAN HELICOPTER."

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Message Attributes

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Sent Date: 27-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Event:
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TAGS: PBOR, PINT, EAIR, MILI, PGOV, SOPN, PN, PQ, BL, US, (BANZER SUAREZ, HUGO), (TORRIJOS HERRERA, OMAR)
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